

Euclid OKs higher rates for sewer upgrades

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Residents in Euclid, Willoughby Hills, Wickliffe, Willowick and portions of Richmond Heights and South Euclid can expect to see their sewer bills increase next month.

That's because Euclid City Council narrowly approved the rate change necessary to fund the \$136 million sewer system upgrades.

Council passed the ordinances by a 5-4 vote this week to increase the rates for Euclid residents by \$12 to \$58.17 per 1,000 cubic feet, or mcf.

According to the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the average household uses 1.875 mcf per quarter. Although depending on family size, that number could range anywhere from 1 mcf to 3 mcf.

Willoughby Hills will see a \$5.70 increase per mcf, Wickliffe and Willowick pay per 1,000 gallons that pass through a meter and will see a 42 cent

increase, and Richmond Heights and South Euclid will pay \$7.20 more per mcf.

The other communities make up about 45 percent of the overall water flow, so Euclid picks up most of the tab because of specific services that only affect the city, such as street repair related to waterlines.

The increase will fund the engineering and construction of the new system once it has been approved by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Written approval for a portion of the project is expected April 18, Law Director Chris Frey said.

Approval of the advanced membrane technology will not be granted until the end of this year, and various options for that technology must still be explored, he said.

Of two options for the membrane technology, one will be more expensive upfront, but will come with lower maintenance costs. Engineers also will need to determine what the existing

plant can accommodate.

Nearly half of council felt uncomfortable approving rate changes without full approval from the U.S. EPA, and many analogies were used at the meeting to express those concerns.

Councilwoman Madeline Scarniench said she would not pay for a car if she could not take possession of it immediately, while Councilman James O'Hare likened the approval to saving for a college education.

Frey said the funds collected will not be used for engineering work of the membrane technology until full EPA approval is granted, and that the action must be passed by council at that time.

"We have to come back to council, and council's not going to approve spending funds on any of these projects unless we have approval from the EPA. I'm pretty confident after tonight's meeting, that's a fair statement," Frey said.

Work that can begin now that funding has been secured includes the elimination of sanitary sewer overflows —

when stormwater gets into the sanitary sewer, causing untreated wastewater to overflow — and sludge line replacement at the existing plant.

The headworks building also will be replaced. This structure screens out larger particles in the water before it is sent to the plant for treatment, Frey said.

The headworks project is expected to cost \$13.3 million, while the sludge line and sanitary sewer elimination are slated for \$17.6 million, with \$8.5 million funded by grants. Only the design engineering will take place at this point, with no physical construction for any portion of the project to begin until next year, Frey said.

Four ordinances were passed, with only the one related to rate increases specifically tied to membrane technology having a split vote.

The other three, including an ordinance to involve green technology in future planning and rate increases for the other upgrades, passed unanimously.